

Romania And The British Model Of Government (1866-1914) : A New Approach To The Study Of The Romanian Politics

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Abstract

In 1866, following the accession of a foreign prince to the Romanian throne and the sanctioning of the new Constitution, the Romanian political elite managed to strengthen the political regime of the age. Both conservative and liberal leaders became conscious of the necessity of structuring a political regime based on the constitutional monarchy, which could generate political, cultural and social-economic changes.

The liberal and conservative politicians, many of which were educated abroad, imposed a series of new principles, ideas and values in the Romanian realm in the second half of the 19th century. These invariably lead to a gradual change of the political regime, the political elite wanting and managing to diminish the gap between Romania and the other European states to a great extent. The present article proposes a new perspective, based on historical facts studied with the instruments of political science and addressing a topic that belongs to the political history and that calls the attention of numerous scholars nowadays.

I also intend to discuss a new approach regarding the analysis of an important aspect of the Romanian political regime. My research concentrates on the following research challenge: How was the British classical model adjusted to the Romanian realm and how did it generate a two-party system with specific features for the Romanian political life?

Keywords: Liberals, conservatives, government alternation, political regime, Romania

Introduction

Attaining and adjusting the European model at all levels: political, social, economic and cultural was a milestone for the political class and for Charles I in their attempt to bring about the modernisation of Romania. The present article intends to illustrate the vision of some of the important

political leaders of the age, both liberals and conservatives, who worked together with Charles I towards the strengthening of the Romanian political regime. The ideas, values and principles of these political leaders were useful in the act of governing and their theoretic basis was related to their own activity within the wider state activities. In time, they accumulated political experience, both at a parliamentary level and at a governmental level.

My research question is thus related to the mode in which the British model of government was adjusted to the Romanian realities and generated a two-party system that managed to gain its own specific features with time.

This article's major objective is to present the vision of a few important politicians regarding the construction of the Romanian political regime. The sources for this are political discourses and memories analysed with the instruments of the critical text analysis and the comparison of the various texts.

I.

The young Romanian state and the liberal political regime

After 1866, the political class and Charles I tried to strengthen the institutions of the state and, implicitly, to help the young Romanian state during a very difficult period from a political, diplomatic, economic and social point of view. Both the liberals and the conservatives had well established principles, which they have maintained in the political realm along time.

The political leader Vasile Boerescu was convinced of the fact that the 1866 Constitution was “*one of the most liberal constitutions in Europe*” (Boerescu, 1910, p. 245), which attracted the loyalty of the political leaders and of Charles I, its principles being attentively respected for a good operation of the Romanian state.

Regarding the nature of the political regime created in Romania after 1866, the politician Vintilă I. Brătianu highlighted the fact that: “*it is well known that the constitutional regime established in 1866, left by the generation that accomplished the political rebirth of Romania, modelled after the Belgian Constitution, itself inspired from the English system, places us in the category of the parliamentary countries, in which the government needs to win the support both of the Parliament and of the chief of state*” (Brătianu, 1906, p. 12).

The European model of state organisation represented a starting point from the creation of the 1866 political regime onwards and the application of some European models in the Romanian political regime turned out to be useful and necessary during that moment in order to diminish the gap that existed between Romania and other European states. In that period, Romania

experienced a liberal political regime. Nonetheless, the country “wasn’t a democratic society. But, it was indeed a liberal one (Bulei, 2013, p. 34).

The operation of the Romanian political regime represented an important concern for the liberal Vintilă I. C. Brătianu, who appreciated the fact that, during its stay in the opposition, a political party had to be “*a control agent of the executive power*” who could “*check the solutions proposed by the adversaries, oppose them when they were not good and even propose different ones*” (Brătianu, 1937, p. 374).

The British model of government was preferred by the majority of the politicians because it ensured the government alternation between two great parties, something that was applied also in the Romanian case. Throughout that period, Charles I was the adept of the British model of government because it ensured the political stability and invariably lead to the modernisation of the country, a major objective he and the political elite had. Under these conditions, we can share the idea that: “Britain has traditionally enjoyed the benefits of a stable, consistent, two-part system” (Ingle, 1987, p. 17).

The existence of the liberal and the conservative groups favoured the formation of the Romanian two-party system, which successfully borrowed the British model of government. Along time, the evolution of the Romanian two-party system had a number of stages, with specific features regarding the political life in general, the relationship between the government and the opposition, the political strife etc.

At the same time, in 1866, the liberal politician Eugeniu Stătescu firmly asserted the government principles followed by the party he belonged to. He highlighted exactly the essential principles stipulated by the 1866 Constitution, which “*set the foundations of the Romanian state*”: “*hereditary monarchy, embodied by Charles I and his dynasty, on the one hand, and liberty and democracy, on the other hand! These are our principles of government. These are the principles that inspired all our actions since the liberal party has acceded to power and in which we have always looked for our power and our line of conduct as a government!*” (Stătescu, 1886, p. 5). He also analysed a crucial aspect of the Romanian political regime - that is the government alternation, underlining the fact that: “*the parties exercised their power in turn, as the context and the interests of the country asked for the leadership of either one group or of the other*” (Stătescu, 1886, p. 24).

Analysing the evolution of the two-party system, one can note several stages but, with the consolidation of the alternation of the two parties, the National Liberal Party (1875) and the Conservative Party (1880), the politicians became acquainted with this political practice, which gradually became a custom of the Romanian political regime.

Coming from the other part of the political spectrum, the Junimea leader P. P. Carp (the Junimea group was a part of the conservative group), expressed the following ideas regarding his vision of the legitimacy of the creation of a government within the Romanian political regime: *“a government is constitutional: first, when the king appoints it and second, when the Parliament maintains it in power”* (Carp, 2000, p. 359).

Nevertheless, the role of the constitutional monarchy was essential in the functioning of the political regime. Prince and then king Charles I (Romania became a kingdom in 1881) reinforced the government alternation of the liberals and the conservatives throughout that period (1866-1914). According to the Constitution, Charles I was an arbitrator of the political life (Damean, 2000, p. 99).

The political leader Alexandru Lahovari referred to the role of Charles I as a constitutional monarch during a meeting of the Senate, on 15 November 1888: *“if we have a constitutional king and a constitutional regime, that is supposed to help us out of such violent bloody solutions [the riots created by the “United Opposition” against the Brătianu government] /.../ Then, the king stops just registering the ministerial decrees and becomes a high arbitrator between the fighting parties”* (Lahovari, 1915, p. 9).

During that time, the two important pillars of the Romanian state were indeed the chief of state and the Parliament - an idea expressed also by the liberal Vintila I. Brătianu and by the Junimea member P. P. Carp. Both the Parliament and the constitutional monarchy lead to the strengthening of the liberal political regime, which was on its way towards democracy.

The development of the Romanian two-party system

From a general perspective, a two-party system can be outlined as follows: *“a two-party system is duopolistic in that it is dominated by two ‘major’ parties that have a roughly equal prospect of winning government power”* (Heywood, 2007, p. 284).

The construction process of the political regime during that age was based on the two-party system. The application of the British model referring to the government alternation represented a constructive aspect of the Romanian political regime. The British model of government was preferred by Charles I and the political elite, because it generated political stability (Jeffrey Kopstein, Marck Lichbach, 2009, p. 54). Under such conditions, over some time, the two-party system engendered stability in the Romanian political regime.

The Romanian two-party system went through several stages within the Romanian political realm; the formation and consolidation of the two government parties, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, the relationship between Charles I and the political elite etc. These stages

were connected to the development of the reign of Charles I (1866-1914): the first stage, between 1866-1871, was characterised by political instability and it was followed by another stage, between 1871-1895, mainly characterised by the tendency of the two political forces to maintain the power for a long period of time.

Under these conditions, Charles I became conscious of the necessity of the structuring of an organised alternation of the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in order to ensure the political stability and consolidate the modernisation of the country - processes that had started in 1866.

Thus, the period 1895-1914 constituted the last stage of the reign of Charles I, a different type of alternation being noted then; during this type of alternation, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party succeeded each other to the government in an organised and efficient manner (each government lasting for an average of four years) that ensured the political stability and the stability of the Romanian two-party system (Dogaru, 2015, pp. 51-56).

The British model of government operated by Romania during the reign of Charles I

After the sanctioning of the 1866 Constitution, the Romanian political regime could be described as liberal, on its way towards democracy. Charles I and the majority of the political leaders considered that the structuring of a political regime on the basis of the two political forces - the liberals and the conservatives - would lead to the consolidation of the institutions of the young Romanian state.

Regarding the state organisation, the British model of government was well adjusted to the Romanian realm, initially imposing a government alternation of the two political groups and then of the two modern political parties, The National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, which generated a two-party system (Hitchins, 2004, p. 104). Even under such conditions, the Romanian two-party system had its own specific features due to the particularities of the Romanian realm regarding the political life, the mentalities of the politicians etc.

For this political project, the liberal leader I. G. Duca discussed the British model that Romania borrowed and maintained during the reign of Charles I. He described this political model as follows: *“for many centuries, England has had two great political parties, the Tory party or conservative and the Whig party or liberal. Out of their strife, out of their ideas and aspirations, the power of Great Britain and its domination appeared /.../ It was rightly said that the secret of the English parliamentarism was the institution of the leader, of the chief of the party who represented and*

personified the tendencies of his group /.../ in Westminster, the opposition itself was organised as well as the cabinet. In the London Parliament, it is the custom that the leader should sit together with his party members at the left of the speaker and in front of the government bench. When the government steps down, the leader goes to sit on the government bench and the former government sits on the opposition bench” (Duca, 1994, p. 11).

The British model of government turned out to be a constructive aspect of the Romanian political regime; the country had a lot to win during that time. With the consolidation of the two-party system, the politicians started getting used with an organised alternation according to the British classical model.

The government alternation of the liberals and the conservatives

An adept of the government alternation of the two political forces, the conservative Take Ionescu considered that this political practice of government “*was not even a new one and would not end soon; one could not guess the moment when it would end because that end would also mean the end of the contemporary Romanian politics and the orientation of the society on a field that was different from the one it worked on until then*” (Ionescu, 1903, p. 103). Take Ionescu understood the utility of the operation and of the maintaining of the government alternation of the two parties with the end to ensure the good operation of the political regime created in 1866.

Moreover, his vision was oriented towards the fact that: “*the parliamentary life was life through the political parties and there was no life through the parties if one party was always in power*” and “*it is /.../ indispensable that the parties alternate in governing the country*” (Ionescu, 1903, p. 106).

Another important leader of the age, Titu Maiorescu, joined the vision of his colleagues and admitted that the government alternation supposed the existence of “*at least two parties that should alternate in power according to the necessities of the country*” (Maiorescu, Vol. IV (1888-1895), 2003, p. 410.) while respecting the well defined parametres of the Romanian political game. His vision was clear: “*a party and a government, through too much use and abuse of its power, reaches a moment when it is not anymore necessary for its country; another party should come and become more useful than the overthrown government*” (Maiorescu, Vol. II (1876-1881), 2003, p. 138.).

I. G. Duca mentioned the fact that, at the end of the year 1913, the liberals, according to the existing political custom, were ready to accede to power while the conservatives, divided as always due to their inner party strife, could not resist for long in power: “*while the conservative government was ready to step down, we were slowly preparing our coming to power. Oh,*

sweet times of party alternation, with so much art transformed by king Charles I in government dogma” (Duca, 1981, p. 13).

Indeed, the majority of the politicians supported the alternation mechanism and the structuring of the political platform in 1866 and, later, the consolidation of the two political forces, which changed from political groups into two great parties and favoured the construction process of the two-party system in Romania.

Conclusion

Although during that age there were also tensioned situations, the politicians, both liberals and conservatives, generally contributed to the normal evolution of the governmental and parliamentary activity. With time, their theoretical basis, obtained during the years they were educated abroad, was completed with a well defined political experience during the reign of Charles I.

With the aid of Charles I, the political class drafted a project that turned out to be feasible since they all understood the necessity to diminish the gap that existed between Romania and the other European states of the time. Their vision was clarified around the political consensus materialised in a well defined strategy on the government alternation of the liberals and the conservatives, according to the British classical model of government.

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